

Stark County Family Court's **CASA/GAL Program**

Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children



*Honorable Judge Jim D. James
Honorable Judge Michael L. Howard
Honorable Judge Rosemarie Hall*



WHY IS A CASA/GAL NECESSARY?

Ohio law requires that a Court Appointed Special Advocate / Guardian Ad Litem (CASA/GAL) be appointed for a child involved in an alleged Dependency, Neglect, or Abuse case, or when the Children Services Agency files a motion to take permanent custody of a child.

WHAT IS A CASA/GAL?

A CASA/Guardian Ad Litem is a person appointed by Stark County Family Court to represent the best interest of a child during a court proceeding. The purpose of the Volunteer CASA/GAL Program is to provide the Court with competent, caring CASA/GsAL who will give the judge a thoughtful recommendation on what should be planned for the child, based on the guardian's independent investigation of the facts.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF A CASA/GAL?

A CASA/GAL is an investigator who will make an independent evaluation after his/her investigation as to what is truly in the child's best interest both in terms of the present situation and also in terms of long term planning. The Guardian will present this information to the Court in a written report, and also attend hearings involving their assigned child(ren).

WHY IS A VOLUNTEER PROGRAM DESIRABLE?

Under the present system, volunteers are needed to reduce guardian costs and to provide much-needed manpower. A trained volunteer, genuinely interested in the welfare of the child, can give the time to do a thorough investigation of all circumstances in the child's life, and, in collaboration with other professionals, arrive at a plan to ensure the child has a safe and permanent home. With this interest and commitment, the volunteer CASA/GAL gives a voiceless, vulnerable child quality representation and provides a valuable service to the community.

HOW DID THE PROGRAM BEGIN?

The CASA/Guardian Ad Litem program began as a result of a need to better represent the rights of abused, neglected and dependent children in Stark County. The Stark County Family Court in cooperation with The Junior League of Canton, Ohio established the volunteer CASA/GAL program in 1982.

THE GOAL OF THE CASA/GAL PROGRAM

To prevent abused, dependent and neglected children from becoming lost in the Juvenile system. When matching a CASA/GAL volunteer with a child, the objective is to ensure that the child's best interest is represented.

The CASA's ultimate goal is to move the child out of temporary placement into a safe permanent home. This could mean return to the parents; adoption; changing legal custody; or some other permanent living arrangement that satisfies the Court and fulfills the child's needs

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CASA/GUARDIAN AD LITEM

- 1) Investigate the life of the child by interviewing the parties involved; To be the child's voice in court, representing his/her best interests
- 2) To assist the Juvenile Court by researching all the circumstances of each case, and then to prepare a thoughtful, timely, *written* report and recommendation for the Court, advocating the child's best interest in the case.
- 3) Attend all Court hearings and other proceedings regarding the child.
- 4) To continue to monitor the child(ren) as the case moves through the system.
- 5) To become a source of emotional support for the child during this tough process.

The Program Coordinator assigns cases, monitors the volunteers' activities and provides assistance as needed.

RECRUITMENT

We are looking for volunteers who are Stark County residents and who are at least twenty-one (21) years of age. For more information, call the CASA/GAL Office at 330-451-7786 or 330-451-7914. Our volunteers come from varied backgrounds and range in age from early 20s to their mid 80s. Their education ranges from high school diploma, to Ph.D. degrees. Some work full-time; some part-time; some are homemakers; and some are retired.

REQUIREMENTS

- Be at least age 21
- Complete an application to the program, and complete an interview with Court
- Agree to a criminal background check
- Complete 30 hours of pre-service training & Court observation. This training, taught by CASA staff and other professionals will instruct the volunteers on the role of the guardian, legal and courtroom procedures, interviewing techniques and social aspects of working with Abused, Neglected and Dependent children.
- Accumulate 12 hours of continuing education each year.
- Applicants will be screened on the basis of time availability, dedication, reliability and willingness to learn. Volunteer must commit to being a CASA/GAL for a minimum of one year.

For More information:
Stark County Family Court
CASA/GAL Office
110 Central Plaza South, Suite 436
Canton, Ohio 44702
Phone 330-451-7786

www.familycourt.co.stark.oh.us

**APPLICATION TO BECOME A
COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE /
GUARDIAN AD LITEM (CASA/GAL)**

Mail Completed Form to:

CASA/GAL Office
110 Central Plaza South, Suite 436
Canton, Ohio 44702
Fax 330-451-7046

Director Allyson J. Blake, ESQ
330-451-7786

For office use only:

Date Rec'd _____ LCCS Check _____
Date in Log _____ Ref's Rec'd 1 2 3
Police Check _____ Interview Date _____

Assistant Director, Jean Desmond
330-451-7914

PLEASE TYPE OR PRINT

Date _____

Name _____
(Last) (First) (Middle)

AKA/FKA (Maiden Name, etc...) _____

Date of Birth _____ Social Security # _____ Male _____ Female _____

Home Address _____
(Number & Street) (City/State) (Zip Code)

Prior addresses for last 5 years & dates at each address: _____

Phone (home) _____ Phone (work) _____ Phone (cell) _____

E-Mail (home) _____ E-Mail (work) _____

Do you speak any foreign languages? _____

FAMILY:

Single: _____ Married: _____ Separated: _____ Divorced: _____ Widowed: _____ Relationship: _____

Name of Spouse (if applicable) _____

Children: (Name) Date of Birth (Gender)

EDUCATION:

Highest Education

Completed: High School / Some College / 2yr Degree / 4yr Degree / Post Grad

Education (including all education – major & minor fields of study)

EMPLOYMENT: (Attach a Resume' if you have one)

May we call you at work? Yes/No

May we E-Mail you at work? Yes/No

Current Employment: Full Time / Part Time / Not Employed / Retired / Student

Employer _____ Position _____

Address _____

How long have you held this job? _____ Supervisor _____

Brief description of your work: _____

List your volunteer or professional experience with youth or the courts:

Do you currently volunteer in any capacity? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, indicate position, agency and days/hours per week: _____

List any other skills/qualifications which may be of value to the CASA Program: _____

Do you have a prior history with any child protective services agency? Yes ____ No ____

If yes, please explain: _____

Have you ever been charged with or convicted of a crime in a court of law? Yes ____ No ____

Please Explain: _____

Do you have an open case of any kind in Stark County Family Court? Yes ____ No ____

Do you hold a valid Ohio Driver's License? Yes _____ No _____

Any health problems or disabilities? _____

How did you learn about CASA? _____

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**WHY DO YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CASA/GAL PROGRAM?**  
*(Please write a paragraph in the space below)*  
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By signing this application, you grant us permission to request information from and share information with other CASA/GAL programs.

I understand that information requested in this application and other information that may otherwise be obtained will be used only for the purpose of deciding my fitness and suitability to serve as a CASA/GAL volunteer and may be shared with other CASA programs, if appropriate.

Signature _____

Date _____

REFERENCE INFORMATION SHEET

Your Name: _____

Date: _____

PLEASE ALERT YOUR REFERENCES THAT WE WILL BE CONTACTING THEM SOON AND NEED A PROMPT REPLY.

DO NOT include family members as references

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

Reference #1 _____

Address: _____

Home Phone _____ Business Phone _____ Other _____

How do you know this person? _____ How long? _____

Reference #2 _____

Address _____

Home Phone _____ Business Phone _____ Other _____

How do you know this person? _____ How long? _____

Reference #3 _____

Address _____

Home Phone _____ Business Phone _____ Other _____

How do you know this person? _____ How long? _____

RELEASE OF INFORMATION

I hereby give my informed consent to the Stark County Court Appointed Special Advocate/Guardian Ad Litem (CASA/GAL) Program, to complete a thorough investigation of my character and fitness to be a CASA/GAL Volunteer.

I understand that by signing this release, I authorize inquiries to be made concerning my suitability as a volunteer to references that I have provided, which include my past and present employers. I further authorize police checks, Bureau of Criminal Investigation checks, and children protective service agencies history checks. I understand that information requested in this application and other information that my otherwise be obtained, will be used only for the purpose of deciding my fitness and suitability to serve as a CASA/GAL Volunteer and may be shared with other CASA programs, if appropriate. I further understand that Ohio law may require additional background checks on me in the future to remain a CASA/GAL Volunteer. I hereby agree to cooperate with such required checks and/or investigations and to sign all necessary releases or resign as a CASA/GAL Volunteer.

This release is good until revoked by me, in writing, at any time before it has been acted upon. Criteria used in the selection of CASA/GAL Volunteers will be such as to ensure that each accepted applicant is able to meet the responsibilities of a CASA/GAL Volunteer. No individual will be rejected because of ethnicity, gender, handicap, nationality, race, religion, age (*if at least 21 years of age*), or marital status. I understand that the Stark County CASA/GAL Program reserves the sole right to determine which individuals are suitable to become CASA/GAL Volunteers. Individuals who have been convicted of a felony, who have been convicted of any criminal act involving drugs or alcohol within the past five (5) years and/or who have a history with a children protective service agency may not be accepted as a CASA/GAL Volunteer. An individual who has been adjudicated to have abused or neglected a child including, but not limited to, any sexual offense, abuse, child endangerment, neglect or who has been involved in related acts that would pose a risk to children or to the program's credibility will not be accepted as a CASA/GAL volunteer.

Print Name _____

Date _____

Date of Birth _____

Social Security # _____

Signature _____